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PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/16/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: RIAD SEIF SUMMONED BY GID CHIEF, DAUGHTER DETAILS
FEBRUARY 15 DETENTION

REF: DAMASCUS 00644

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b)/(d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: One day after being detained, in blindfold and handcuffs, for five hours by unknown security service officers, prominent opposition figure Riad Seif was called in for another meeting with General Intelligence Directorate (GID) chief Ali Mamluk on February 16. Seif spent at least six hours in Mamluk's office, missing a scheduled meeting with Charge and Polchief. Security officers have made clear to Seif, his family, and at least one associate that continued political work will not be tolerated and will "be fought with legal and not so legal means." END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Prominent opposition activist Riad Seif has come under intense security scrutiny over the last three days. Seif met with General Intelligence Directorate (GID) chief Ali Mamluk for two hours the afternoon of February 14, during which Mamluk's general message was that Seif had to give up politics. Seif was then detained by unknown security service personnel from 5:00 AM until 10:00 AM on February 15 (reftel). Seif's daughter Joumana detailed these events in her father's absence at a February 16 meeting with Charge, PolChief, and Poloff. She said that at 3:00 AM, security service personnel took Seif's nephew from his home, in pajamas, demanding that the nephew take them to Seif's son Jawad. At 4:10 AM, the same officials took Jawad Seif by force and demanded that he take them to his father's home. The officials refused to identify their security branch affiliation. At 4:30 AM, Jawad and the officials arrived at Riad Seif's home, but were unable to wake him due to Seif's severe hearing problem. Seif awoke at 5:00 AM, and hearing the commotion outside, telephoned his daughter, who explained that Jawad was outside with officials. Seif allowed the officials into the apartment and insisted on packing a jail kit. Seif was then blindfolded and handcuffed and led away. The security officials told Jawad that "Every word you say, you will lose one family member--your wife, your children, your mother, your father." According to Seif's daughter, it was clear that the security officials knew exactly where Seif's home is and simply wanted to terrorize the family members and show their power.

13. (C) Seif was then taken to an unknown detention location and was interrogated by "two different voices." According to his daughter, Seif had noted that one voice was "normal", while the other was impolite and "hateful" using all possible Arabic swear words. For two hours, Seif was left in a very cold room which he thought was at a below-freezing temperature, despite having his coat on (NOTE: This statement matches statements by other political detainees that the SARG has constructed "freezer rooms" in some of their interrogation centers). The interrogators gave Seif three

warnings: first, that he should have no contact with foreign Arab media; second, that he should have no contact with diplomats; third, that he must sign an oath not to work in politics. According to Seif's daughter, the interrogators told Seif "now it's a warning" but if he ignored their message, "you will see...we will humiliate you."

¶4. (C) Seif returned home at approximately 10:15 A.M. He was called at 4:00 P.M. by security officials, who told him to appear at a meeting with GID Chief Ali Mamluk at 8:00 AM February 16. Seif went to the meeting at 8:00 AM and had not returned by 1:30 P.M. In the presence of Charge, PolChief, fellow former Damascus Spring detainee Habib Issa, and Atassi Forum member Jihad Matsouti, Seif's daughter contacted the GID office and was told that the interview would "only take a half hour more" and that she "shouldn't worry."

¶5. (C) Seif's office and at least one associate have also come under intense scrutiny. Seif's daughter and colleague, Hossam Abu Mohammed Shehadeh, arrived at Seif's downtown Damascus office on the morning of February 16 to discover a team of security agents stationed outside the office door. Charge and Polchief counted at least five men, with another man stationed a few floors below. The agents told Seif's daughter that they would be there permanently, and demanded information about visitors (including about the Charge and Polchief, after their departure from the office). Seif's daughter also noted that Shehadeh had been called in to Political Security on the night of February 15 for two and a half hours. He was interrogated about Seif's political preparations, who is "pushing him", and if he is receiving any money from the West. They insisted that the language Seif has been using was "close to the Lebanese." The interrogators asked repeated questions about Seif's children

and which one was pushing him to be politically active, emphasizing Joumana's activism while Seif had been imprisoned. The interrogators repeated the three warnings given earlier to Seif and warned Shehadeh that "you're Seif's right hand" and that "we'll fight you legally...and not so legally." The told Shehadeh that "We can open a discussion, but on our terms." They closed by saying that "you are all watched and under control and can't move without us knowing."

¶6. (C) Seif's daughter was visibly shaken by the events and clearly uneasy about the increased security presence. She expressed concern that the SARG may now go after her brother's children or her own three children, and expressed uncertainty as to what next steps her father should take.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: As we suspected, the SARG is clearly spooked by Seif's potential political appeal and is working vigorously, using intimidation of family and threats to re-imprison Seif, to keep him off-balance and silenced. It may also be gathering material for another trumped-up set of charges against him that would allow the regime to get him back behind bars and off the Arab satellite TV stations. Despite the confident signals the SARG has sent out over the past few weeks, it clearly remains on edge and ready to overreact to ensure the internal opposition does not come together behind a unifying figure like Seif. END COMMENT.
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